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FACTORS AFFECTING SOCIAL ATTAINMENT AMONG INDIVIDUALS: EVIDENCE
FROM THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY 1988-2000

by

MICHAEL F. NDOFOR

Under the Direction of Ted Brimeyer

ABSTRACT

This study draws from extant literature on social attainment to examine what factors affect the attaining of higher incomes, education, and occupational ranks. Research on five distinct factors is examined and analyzed using a sample of about 6,000 students from a national longitudinal study across the United States between 1988-2000 as they transitioned from eight grade through high school and into the labor force: (1) background characteristics: household type, race, and gender, (2) social capital, (3) cultural capital, (4) academic ability, and (5) parental social class. The results revealed that these factors affect social attainment. I also examined if parental socio-economic status interacts with other factors. The results of the study showed that the gap between rich and poor has grown over the last 30 years. The rich are getting further ahead in the race for social attainment.

INDEX WORDS: Attainment, Inequality, Status, Students, Parents, Interaction, Class, Capital

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MICHAEL F. NDOFOR

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of the Requirements for the Degree

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MICHAEL F. NDOFOR

Major Professor: Ted Brimeyer
Committee: Pidi Zhang
Eric Silva

Electronic Version Approved:
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DEDICATION

Mrs. Virginia F. Ndofor

The reasons why I met you lies somewhere and I wake up every day searching to find it. The more I look, the more I discover, learn, and cherish your uniqueness. I will live every day searching to find what I don't know.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Inequality in social attainment has grown significantly in the United States over the past 30 years. In 1980, incomes for working class Americans, except the richest 10 percent, averaged just under \$31,000 (in 2006 inflation-adjusted dollars). In the subsequent quarter century those working class incomes did not rise. Meanwhile, incomes for those in the top one hundredth of 1 percent rose considerably from \$5.4 to \$29.6 million (Goldsmith, Clinton, & Blakely, 2010). Today, the top 1 percent as a group earned as much as the bottom 150 million a ratio of 500 to 1 (Goldsmith, Clinton, & Blakely, 2010). Among the countries ranked according to the degree of human development and income inequality, the United States has the most income inequality compared to other developed countries (Shi & Stevens, 2010, p. 58).

According to a U.S. Census report, since 2007, the year before the most recent recession, real median household income has declined 6.4 percent and is 7.1 percent below the median household income of 1999 (Census.Gov, 2011). The gap in income and wealth inequality has led to stagnation in social attainment for those in the middle and decline for those in the bottom classes (Goldsmith, Clinton, & Blakely, 2010, pp. 40-50). Inequality affects social attainment because it prevents people from achieving an education, income growth, and occupational growth—the American Dream (Lin & Harris, 2008; McNamee & Miller, 2009; Perrucci & Wysong, 2008). Income inequality for example, can affect social attainment by limiting where people in the lower classes can live or enroll their children in school. In the U.S., because education is funded by local property taxes, schools in wealthy districts tend to be well funded

and can afford to provide better resources, such as information technology and smaller class sizes, than schools in low-income districts.

Perrucci & Wysong (2008) show schools in wealthy districts score higher in national standardized tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and have higher graduation rates than schools in low-income districts. Therefore the inability of those in the lower classes to live in these types of districts may affect the quality of education, graduation, and achievement rates of their children (Gruber, 2004; Perrucci & Wysong, 2008; Lin & Harris, 2008). Inequality affects social attainment because it limits the ability of parents or individuals to pay for college or send their children to colleges and universities, which is a prerequisite for occupational and income growth in today's job market. According to the Census, in 2011, households with lower levels of education were more likely to remain in, or move into, a lower economic quintile than households whose occupants had higher levels of education. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that affect social attainment. It will examine factors affecting social attainment using data obtained from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) from 1988-2000. The research question guiding this study is: What factors affect social attainment?

Five Factors Studied by Researchers that Affect Social Attainment

The following section summarizes five major sociological viewpoints on social attainment: (1) background characteristics: household type, race, and gender, (2) social capital, (3) cultural capital, (4) academic ability, and (5) parental socioeconomic status. Based on arguments associated with each viewpoint, I develop several hypotheses to find how these factors affect social attainment using each individual's parental socioeconomic status as a starting point. Later in my data analysis, I will test these hypotheses with data obtained from the NELS.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background Characteristics

Household Type

The role of household type has been used by researchers to explain inequalities in social attainment and destination status. Researchers have compared two-parent households to other types. A report released by the Census in 2011, for example, shows in 2010, households with two parents earned on average \$72,751, compared to \$32,031 for single parent households headed by a female and \$49,718 for households headed by males. Research by Lin & Harris (2008) and Wax (2007) shows children who grow up with single or unmarried parents have lower levels of educational completion and achievement due to fewer resources than children who are raised in two parent households. Portes (2000) argues that two-parent families help children succeed in life because they double their supervisory and support capacities (pp. 5-10). Overall, this research suggests the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Students from two-parent households will attain higher levels of social attainment than those from other types of households.

Gender

Feminism is an emancipatory theoretical tradition that seeks to identify and understand specific forms of oppression that may inhibit women's social attainment (Baxter & Western, 2001, p. 28). One area that has come under scrutiny by feminist theorists is what is known as the "glass ceiling." The "glass ceiling" refers to discriminatory policies that limit the social attainment of qualified women, by keeping them out of top management positions. Scholars have looked at how the "glass ceiling" affects social attainment for women in corporate America.

Branson (2010) and Klenke (2011) show although women make up more than 50 percent of the labor force in 2009, there were only 15 female Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in Fortune 500 companies. Researchers have also looked at educational attainment and its effects on income and occupational growth. A report in 2011, by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) show that since 1976, the percentage of women earning two year, bachelors, and master's degrees increased substantially compared to men.

For example, compared to black males, black females earned 68 percent of associate's degrees, 66 percent of bachelor's degrees, 72 percent of master's degrees, 62 percent of first-professional degrees, and 67 percent of doctoral degrees. Hispanic females compared to Hispanic males earned 62 percent of associate's degrees, 61 percent of bachelor's degrees, 64 percent of master's degrees, 53 percent of first-professional degrees, and 57 percent of doctoral degrees. White females earned more degrees than White males for each level of degree except first-professional, for which they earned 46 percent of the degrees awarded. Despite these increases in number of degrees awarded, a study by the U.S. Census in 2010 showed women still earn only 77 cents on a dollar in 2008 compared to a male. Blau & Kahn (2000) show that even when other factors are accounted for, gender differences in pay still exists between men and women by as much as 33 percent (pp. 81-97). This body of research suggests the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2 (a): Females will attain higher levels of education than males

Hypothesis 2 (b): Males will attain higher levels of income than females.

Race

For years sociologists have noted significant differences across groups affecting opportunities for social attainment. For much of the history of the U.S., racial/ethnic minorities, particularly African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans, have had to contend with

CHAPTER 2

discrimination at both the inter-personal and structural levels (Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009). A body of literature exists that shows differences in education attainment, test scores, and income between blacks and whites (Lin & Harris, 2008; Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009; Elliott, Jung, & Chowa, 2010; Rowley & Right, 2011). In 2010, the Census shows that the median household income for blacks was \$32,068 and \$51,846 for whites (Census, 2010). Kozol (2005) showed that African Americans and Hispanic students are more likely than whites and Asians to attend schools that are poorly funded and have fewer resources such as qualified teachers (pp. 41-50). The research suggests the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Hispanics, African Americans, and Native Americans will achieve lower levels of social attainment than whites and Asians.

Social Capital

Social capital is one factor researchers have used in explaining differences among individuals in attaining upward mobility. Social capital can be described as “the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures” (Lin & Harris, 2009). Halpern (2005) outlines five forms of capital: cultural, financial, physical, human, and social (p. 4). Of all the forms of capital, social capital has been the most widely used to explain differences in social attainment. Two types of social capital are used in this study: academic social capital and community social capital. I defined academic social capital as benefits students secure by having a network of school friends that share similar interests in succeeding academically. Community social capital is defined as benefits students secure by participating in community and volunteer agencies. In his book *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), Wilson argues that the isolation of poor urban communities from middle-class neighborhoods,

contributes to poverty and inequality because it limits the networks of individuals they can come in contact with to help them secure quality employment. Wilson's argument has been used by other scholars to show that the lack of social networks can limit an individual's educational attainment and job prospects (see Portes, 2000; Lin & Harris, 2009; Coughy & O'Campo, 2006).

Portes (2000) argues that children of Asian immigrants attain high education due to a third factor such as higher average education of the population, higher average income, and past democratization struggles that increased their social capital. Asians upon their arrival to the U.S., depend on the existing networks, bonds, and social solidarity of other Asians already in U.S. to help them adapt and move ahead. In particular, he noted, the educational progress of the second generation who depend heavily on parental guidance, as well as on support from other community members who have social capital due to higher average rate of education of within the community. Portes also emphasized the importance of "closure" as a form of social capital that is created by parents' knowledge of their children's friends and their friend's parents. According to Portes intact families double the supervisory role and supportive capacity of parents, while closure expands these capacities further by involving other adults in supervising children (pp. 5-10). Using data from the NELS to test the argument of strong social capital effects on immigrant children's academic attainment, a bivariate analysis showed strong support for social capital predictions (Portes, 2000). This argument suggests the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Social capital will be positively related to levels of social attainment

CHAPTER 2

Cultural Capital

The values individuals and groups share with others and society has come under scrutiny as to how they may affect social attainment. McNamee & Miller (2009) and Small, Harding, & Lamont (2010) attempt to clarify our understanding of how an individual's values may affect social outcome. According to Small, Harding and Lamont (2010) the greatest barrier to social attainment for poor and lower class individuals is their lack of necessary language skills, values, and tastes favored by upper and middle class individuals (p. 18). McNamee & Miller (2009) cited the work of Lareau (2000) to explain how middle class mothers who are more educated than lower class mothers regulate their children's extracurricular activities, for example, reading to them and involving them in sports that help them build cultural capital (p. 91). Lin and Harris (2008) expanded on the role of cultural capital in achieving social mobility by using culture as a repertoire. They cite the work of Swidler (1986), who approaches culture as a "tool kit" which individuals have and can open in unsettled times to help deal with crisis. According to Lin and Harris, Swidler viewed culture as influencing actions not by providing the ultimate values toward which action is oriented but by shaping a repertoire or 'tool kit' of habits, skills, and styles from which individuals construct their 'strategies of action.' The toolboxes of middle class individuals have more repertoires than those of lower classes (pp. 81-82). In this study I define cultural capital as the values families have on academic success for their children by encouraging them to stay in school, maintain good grades, and attend school regularly.

Cultural capital has also been used to explain how middle and upper-class parents are able to pass on advantages to their children by familiarizing them with habits and behavioral

CHAPTER 2

styles valued by the educational system. Lareau & Lamont (1988) describe the processes by which middle-class parents pass on cultural capital advantages to their children. Middle-class parents practice what they term “concerted cultivation” by providing their children with many structured activities such as piano lessons that teach them to function in institutional settings, and by talking to their children in ways that engage them, thus helping them to perform better in school. In contrast, poor and working-class parents practice “natural growth,” allowing for much unstructured free time without meaningful activities like reading to improve their cultural capital (p 19). Overall, the research suggests the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5: Cultural capital will be positively related to levels of social attainment.

Academic Ability

Studies looking at academic ability in terms of math and reading skills, educational success, and college completion show a strong correlation between reading, math SAT test scores, placement test scores, and cumulative college GPA (Manning & Schumacher, 2005; Spencer & Trusty, 2003). Using a national longitudinal sample of 5,257 young people, Spencer and Trusty (2003) found that respondents who were pursuing a bachelor's degree, and who took credits in intensive high school math courses, including Algebra 2, Calculus, Pre-Calculus, and Trigonometry while in high school, showed higher college completion rates, than those who did not take them. Overall, the research suggests the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6: Academic ability will be positively related to levels of social attainment.

Parental Social Class

McNamee & Miller (2009) argue that the race for social attainment is rigged in terms of economic competition in favor of children born to parents with higher socioeconomic status.

They used the metaphor of a relay race to show that poor children start at or near the bottom end of the competition, while children from wealthy parents start at or near the finish line (pp. 55-56). Evidence from McNamee & Miller (2009) showed that the chance of moving from the lowest to the highest SES is substantially low due to the passage of inter-generational wealth from parent to children. For example, 36 percent of children born to parents in the lowest quartile remain there as adults, while 36 percent of those born to parents in the highest quartile remain there as adults (pp. 60-61). This scholarship suggests the following hypothesis.

Hypotheses 7: Parental socioeconomic status will be positively related to social attainment.

While the race to social attainment is difficult, some young people from the lowest social class are able to achieve higher social classes. For instance, some students from lower social classes may be able to overcome great odds and move up in SES. This suggests that we should examine the possible interactive effects of PSES with other factors. There are two possible relationships between SES and other factors that explain social attainment.

The first perspective, “equivalent effects,” suggests that regardless of PSES other factors such as family type, gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability will have the same effect on each group in achieving social attainment. This is because regardless of SES members of every social class can leverage their academic ability as well as their cultural capital and academic social capital, to achieve high scores in math and reading and develop a network of school friends to help them attain high level of social attainment. Equivalent effect means the distance between people from different PSES quartiles would not change or inequality would stay the same. For example, going back to the relay race metaphor, if students start at different places and are equally assisted by one of the

factors (e.g., family type) the gap between them would remain the same. This is because those with high SES started at near or close to the top and can afford to have one parent stay home and supervise their children more so than those in low SES.

The second perspective, the “non-equivalent effects,” suggests that the effects of various factors such as family type, gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability will be class specific to attainment. This is because in the race for social attainment individuals will start at different places depending on their SES. Non-equivalent effects means the rich would get further ahead in social attainment or the poor would catch. For example, if students start at different places and are unequally assisted by one of the factors (e.g., academic ability) the poor would close the gap in social attainment if they have exceptional academic abilities and scored high in Math and reading standardized tests. This is because high scores in standardized tests such as math are strong predictors of education completion and graduation rates.

Also if students start at different places and are unequally assisted by one of the factors (e.g., social capital) the rich would get further ahead because they started at close to the top of the race and have more networks of friends they can make use to help their children. This is because individuals with high SES have tangible economic resources like wealth and capital to live in neighborhoods that have better schools and can afford the expenses to put their children through college. The research question guiding these perspectives is: Are the effects of other factors equivalent or non-equivalent across SES groups?

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS & DATA

The data for this study come from the NELS from 1988-2000. The NELS is a clustered and stratified sample of 1,052 public and private schools with about 25,000 students from across the U.S. Students were initially interviewed in 1988 with subsequent interviews in 1990, 1992, 1994, and most recently in 2000 to track their progress as they transitioned from high school into post-secondary education and the labor force. The study uses data from three interview periods: from 1988, representing the base year, 1992 representing the second follow-up when students were in twelfth grade, and 2000 when students had finished high school, were in college, or working. Only students that were not enrolled in higher education in 2000 are included in the study. The dependent variables of the study include: (1) total income, (2) total education, and (3) occupational rank. See table 1 in the appendix for descriptive statistics of all variables.

Total Income

Total income comes from respondent's responses reported in 2000. Respondent income includes: wages, salaries, and commissions earned in 1999, and any other amounts earned from employment before taxes and all other deductions. The annual income range is (\$0.00-\$500,000.00). A log conversion of annual income is used as total income with a mean of 9.45 and standard deviation of 2.17.

Total Education

Total education is constructed using answers reported from the NELS in the fourth follow-up conducted in 2000 and includes: (1) highest post-secondary education (PSE) degree attained as of 2000, and (2) high school completion status as of 2000.

The NELS measured the highest post-secondary degree attained as of 2000 using the series of degree type to determine the highest degree awarded. Respondents who were unable to provide a degree type were excluded and were coded as missing. Degree types were coded as: (1) = some post-secondary education, 2 = no degree attained, 3 = certificate/license, 4 = associate's degree, 5 = bachelor's degree, 6 = master's degree/equivalent and 6 = Ph.D., M.D., J.D., or other professional degree).

High school completion status as of 2000 was measured by the NELS using high school diploma, GED, or certificate as of 2000. It was derived from high school completion status reported in collected high school transcripts in 1993 and were coded as: (1 = had a diploma or equivalent, 2 = working toward a diploma/equivalent, and 3 = neither). Respondents who did not have a record were coded as missing.

Total education is computed by combining the values of high school completion status as of 2000 and highest PSE degree attained as of 2000 and recoded as: -1 = less than high school, 0 = high school, 1 = some post-secondary education, 2 = associate degree or certificate, 3 = bachelors degree, 4 = master degree, and 5 = Ph.D., or professional degree with a mean of 2.87 and standard deviation of 1.43.

Occupational Rank

Occupational rank is computed by using respondent's occupational status reported in the fourth follow-up in 2000. The NELS computed occupational values by asking respondents a two part question: (1) job title and (2) duties. Job titles were computed by asking respondents the following question: What is your job title for your primary or most important job (if more than one current job)? What was your job title (if formerly employed)? What is your job title (if currently employed at one job)?

Job duties were computed by asking respondents: What you (do/did) as a job title? Occupation, duties, and type of business (industry) for the current/most recent job were collected in a series of questions. Then, the corresponding occupation and industry codes for the current/most recent job were selected by the NELS using a computer-assisted lookup list of occupations.

I combined the job titles and occupational classifications based on industry codes to compute an occupational ranking using Nakao and Treas (1989) socioeconomic index of occupations. The NELS computed some of the respondent's job titles/categories as a group. To find the occupational rank score of these groups I used the mean of the group as a score. For example, the NELS grouped (cashiers, tellers, and sales clerks) as an occupational job title/category. I used the occupational rank scores of cashiers, tellers, and sales clerks and added all three scores to find the mean as an occupational score. Finally, I recoded the values of occupational rank scores with the NELS code for current/previous occupation and performed a log conversion to obtain the total occupational score with a mean of 3.84 and standard deviation of .32. See table 2 in the appendix showing the classification of respondent's job titles/categories, occupational rank scores, and number of respondents associated with each category. Low scores indicate low occupational status and high scores indicate high occupational status.

The independent variables of the study are: (1) family type, (2) gender, (3) race, (4) social capital, (5) cultural capital, (5) academic ability, and (6) parental socioeconomic status. Family type is constructed using the NELS base year family composition composite in the first survey conducted in 1988. The characteristics of family or household composition were constructed from respondent's responses to the following question in base year 1988: Which of the following

people live in the same household with you? Respondents were asked to choose from the following categories: father, other male guardian (stepfather or foster father), mother, other female guardian (stepmother or foster mother), brother(s) (including step- or half-) sister(s) (including step- or half-), grandparent(s), other relative(s) (children or adults), and non-relative(s) (children or adults). The NELS used these measures to compute the base year family composition composite as follows: 1 = mother and father, 2 = mother and male guardian, 3 = father and female guardian, 4 = mother only, 5 = father only and 6 = other relative or non-relative. Family type was computed using codes 1, 2, and 3 as two-parent and 4, 5, and 6 as other with two-parent = 1 and other = 0.

Gender was constructed by NELS as a sex composite with 1 = male and 2 = female. It is recoded as a dummy variable with 1 = male and 0 = female.

Race was constructed by the NELS into the following categories: 1 = Asian Pacific Islander, 2 = Hispanic, 3 = Black, not Hispanic, 4 = White, not Hispanic, and 5 = Native American. Race is recoded with white = 0 other groups each coded as 1. White is use as a reference.

Social capital is constructed by the NELS using responses reported in the second follow-up in 1992. It is constructed in this study in two categories: academic social capital and community social capital. Academic social capital is constructed using the series of questions the NELS asked respondents: (1) Among friends, how important to attend classes regularly, (2) Among friends, how important to continue education past high school, (3) Among friends, how important to study, (4) Among friends, how important to get good grades, and (5) Among friends, how important to finish high school. The NELS coded academic social capital using these responses: (1) not important, (2) some importance, and (3) very important. Community

social capital is constructed using respondent's responses to the following question: (1) important to do community work/volunteer, and (2) important to participate in religious activity. The NELS coded community social capital using these responses: (1) not important, (2) some importance, and (3) very important. A reliability test of community social capital showed a value of $\alpha = .61$, while academic social capital is $\alpha = .83$.

Cultural capital is constructed by the NELS using responses in the second follow-up conducted in 1992. Respondent's parents were asked the following question: Are there family rules that are enforced for your teenager about any of the following activities: family rule about maintaining grade average, family rule about doing homework, and family rule about attending school regularly. The coded values were 1 = yes and 2 = no. A reliability test performed shows a score of $\alpha = .75$.

Academic Ability is constructed using responses on respondent's standardized test scores computed by the NELS. They include: (1) History/CIT/Geography, (2) Reading, and (3) Mathematics. A reliability test was performed and showed a high score of $\alpha = .97$.

Parental social class is constructed using the base year family socioeconomic status computed by NELS into socioeconomic quartiles using parental family education, income, and occupation with lowest quartile=1, and highest quartile=4. Parental social class is used as an initial position of all students to determine their levels of social attainment in 2000.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Table 3 in the appendix shows the regression of the dependent variables on the independent variables. Model 1 shows the regression of income on parental socioeconomic status (PSES), family type, gender, and race. The results show that PSES, gender, and family type are significantly related to income, while race is not. Students from higher PSES were more likely than those from lower PSES to attain higher incomes. Male students are more likely than females to attain higher incomes. Compared to other household types students from two-parent households were more likely to attain higher incomes.

Model 2 shows the regression of income on PSES, family type, gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability. The results show that PSES, gender, and cultural capital are significantly related to income. Students from higher PSES compared to those from lower PSES are more likely to attain higher incomes. Male students are more likely than female students to attain higher levels of incomes. Cultural capital is negatively significant to higher income. In model 2 family types is not significantly related to income after academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability are included in the regression. PSES, gender are positively related to income. This may be because individuals from high PSES are closer at or near the top of social attainment and can use this to help their children in the labor market more so than those from low PSES. Also high SES parents may have set high academic values that encouraged their children to maintain grades and stay in school because one parent can afford to stay home. Males attain higher incomes than females. This is because males earn more than females on the dollar (Census, 2000).

Model 3 shows the regression of total education on PSES, family type, gender, and race. The model shows that PSES, family type, gender, and race are significantly related to education. Students from higher PSES and two-parent households are more likely than those from lower PSES and other household types to attain high levels of education. Male students attain lower levels of education than females. Compared to whites, Asians attain higher levels of education while African Americans, Hispanics, and Native American students attain less education.

Model 4 shows the regression of total education on PSES, family type, gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability. The results show that PSES, family type, race, gender, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability are significantly related to total education. It shows that students from higher PSES and those from two-parent households are more likely than those from lower PSES and other household types to attain high levels of education. Male students attain less education than females. In terms of race Asians are more likely than whites to attain high levels of education while Hispanics, blacks, and Native Americans are less likely than whites to attain high levels of education. Academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability are positively related to high education. High scores in standardized tests as well as having networks that provide social benefits are shown in the literature as strong predictors of social attainment. All factors in model 4 are significantly related to education. This may be because individuals from high SES are more likely to have two-parent households that can double their economic resources and supervisory roles and instill in them academic values needed to attain high education.

Model 5 shows the regression of occupational rank on PSES, family type, gender, and race. The model shows that PSES, family type, gender, and race are significantly related to

occupational rank. Students from higher PSES and two-parental households are more likely than those from lower PSES and other household types to attain high occupational ranks. Asians are more likely than whites to attain high occupational ranks. Males attain lower occupational ranks than females.

Model 6 shows the regression of occupational rank on PSES, family type, gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability. The results show that PSES, race, academic social capital, community social capital, and academic ability are significantly related to occupational rank. Students from higher PSES are more likely than those from lower PSES to attain high occupational ranks. In terms of race Asians are more likely than whites to attain high occupational ranks. Family type and gender are not significantly related to occupational rank after academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability are included in the regression. This may be because respondents are still in school, or are not working. PSES, race, academic social capital, and academic ability are positively related to occupational rank while community social capital is negatively related to occupational rank. This is because high class individuals have economic resources like wealth and more networks of friends that their children can exploit to find jobs or enter into jobs that have high occupational rank. Also individuals with academic ability tend to pursue careers that have high occupational ranks like lawyers and engineers.

Interaction

The results in tables 4, 5, and 6 show the interaction regression of the dependent variables on other factors for each of the PSES groups. It is conducted to examine the equivalent and non-equivalent effects of factors on social attainment across PSES groups. Table 4 in the appendix shows the regression of income on the independent variables dividing base year parental

socioeconomic status into quartiles. The interaction regression is done to examine if factors affect social attainment differently based on parental SES.

Model 1 shows the regression of income for students in the first quartile on family type, gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability. The result shows that gender is positively related to income while race is negatively related to income. It shows that males are more likely than females to attain higher levels of income. In terms of race Native Americans are less likely than whites to attain high levels of income. The result also shows that family type, academic social capital, community social capital, and academic ability are not related to income. Males attain high levels of income than females because they earn on average more on a dollar than females.

Model 2 shows the regression for students in the second PSES quartile on family type, gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability. The results show that gender positively related to high income, while community social capital is negatively related to income. It shows that women are less likely than men to attain high levels of income. The results also show that family type, race, academic social capital, and academic ability are not related to income.

Model 3 shows the regression for students in the third PSES quartile on family type, gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability. The results show that family type, gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, and cultural capital are significantly related to income. It shows that students from two-parent households are more likely than those from other household types to attain high levels of income. Compared to females, males are more likely to have high levels of income. In terms of race blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans are less likely than whites to attain high

levels of income. Academic social capital is positively related to high income, while cultural capital is negatively related to high income. Students in this quartile may have made use of their networks of school friends and strong family rules on maintaining good grades to help them finish school and find jobs that paid high incomes. Students from two-parent households are more likely than those from other household types to attain high levels of incomes, but only in this quartile.

Model 4 shows the regression for students in the fourth PSES quartile on family type, gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability. The results show that gender is positively related to income. It shows that compared to women, men are more likely to attain high levels of incomes.

Table 5 in the appendix shows the regression of education on the independent variables divided into PSES quartiles. Model 1 shows the regression for students in the first quartile on family type, gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability. The results show that race, community social capital, and academic ability are significantly related to educational attainment. In terms of race, Asians are more likely than whites to attain high levels of education. Community social capital is negatively related to higher education, while academic ability is positively related to higher education.

Model 2 shows the regression for students in the second quartile on family type, gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability. The results show that gender, race, academic social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability are significantly related to higher educational attainment. Female students are more likely than males to attain high levels of education. Compared to Hispanics and blacks, whites are more

likely to attain high levels of education. Academic social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability are positively related to higher education.

Model 3 shows the regression for students in the third quartile on family type, gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability. The results show that race, academic social capital, and academic ability are significantly related to educational attainment. Compared to whites, Asians are more likely to have high levels of education. Hispanics are less likely than whites to have high levels of education. Academic social capital and academic ability are positively related to higher education.

Model 4 shows the regression for students in the fourth quartile on family type, gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability. The results show that family type, race, academic social capital, community social capital, cultural capital and academic ability are significantly related to high education attainment. Students from two-parent households are more likely than those from other household types to attain high levels of education. Compared to whites, Hispanics and Native Americans are less likely to attain high levels of education.

Table 6 in the appendix shows the regression of occupational ranks on the independent variables divided into PSES quartiles. Model 1 shows the regression for students in the first quartile on family type, gender, race, community social capital, academic social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability. The results show that gender, race, academic social capital, community social capital, and academic ability are significantly related to occupational rank. It shows that males are less likely than females to attain high occupational ranks. Compared to whites, Asians are more likely to attain high occupational rank.

Model 2 shows the regression for students in the second quartile on the other variables. The results show that gender, academic social capital, and academic ability are significantly related to occupational rank. It shows that males are less likely to attain high occupational ranks than females.

Model 3 shows the regression for students in the third quartile on the other variables. The results show that race, academic social capital, and academic ability are significantly related to occupational attainment. It shows that Hispanics are less likely than whites to attain high occupational rank. This may be due to discrimination in the labor market that prevents Hispanics from occupational attainment.

Model 4 show the regression for students in the fourth quartile on the other variables. The results show that family type, gender, race, academic social capital, and academic ability are significantly related to high occupational rank. Students from two-parent households are more likely than those from other household types to attain high occupation rank. Compared to whites, Asian students are more likely to achieve higher levels of occupational ranks. Males are more likely than females to attain high occupational ranks. Family type is positively related to occupational attainment, but only in quartile 4. This is because two-parent households in high SES have resources like wealth to allow one parent to stay home and supervise their children more so than those in other types of households in low SES.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The results of the study provide new insights on individual social attainment and provide support for some of the hypotheses outlined in the literature. Hypothesis 1 (H1) suggests, students from two-parent households will attain higher levels of social attainment, than those from other household types. The results support H1 and show that students from two-parent households are more likely than those from other types of households to achieve higher levels of social attainment. However, the addition of other factors indicates that household type is indirectly related to high levels of income and occupational rank. This may be because other factors such as cultural capital (e.g., strong family rules on attending school regularly and maintaining good grades) may be more important in levels of social attainment more so than family type.

As suggested in H 2a, females will attain higher levels of education than males. The result of the study supports H 2a and shows that women are more likely than men to attain high levels of educations. H 2 b, suggests males will attain higher levels of income than females. The results support the hypothesis. The results show that men are more likely than women to attain high levels of income. As shown in the literature females earn on average 77 cents on a male dollar and face discrimination in occupational growth.

Hypothesis 3 suggests Hispanics, African Americans, and Native Americans students will achieve lower levels of social attainment than whites and Asians. The results of the study supports the hypothesis and shows that whites and Asians are more likely than other groups to attain high levels of social attainment. This is because whites and Asians live in wealthy districts

which have better school resources such as high teacher salary and spend high per pupil compared to the other groups.

Hypothesis 4 suggests social capital will be positively related to levels of social attainment. The results of the study revealed mixed support for the hypothesis. The results show that academic social capital and community social capital are significantly related to high education and occupational rank, but not high income after additional factors are controlled for. This is because students may have made use of their networks of school friends and participation in community agencies to help them finish school and find jobs with high occupational ranks.

As suggested in H 5 cultural capital will be positively related to levels of social attainment. The results revealed mixed support for the hypothesis. The results show that cultural capital is a significant predictor of high incomes and education, but not occupational rank after additional factors are controlled for. This may be due to strong family rules encouraging students to stay and finish school by making sure they attend school regularly and maintain good grades. Students may have also entered the labor market in jobs that compensated them well.

As suggested in H 6 academic ability will be positively related to levels of social attainment. The results revealed mixed support for the hypothesis. It shows that academic ability is significantly related to high education and incomes, but not occupation rank. This is because high scores in standardized tests are strong predictors of education completion and graduation rates as shown in the literature. Also students who scored high in their standardized tests may have earned degrees in fields that paid well as they transitioned into the labor market.

Hypothesis 7 suggests parental social class will be positively related to social attainment. The results of the study strongly support the hypothesis. The results show that PSES is significantly related to high social attainment. Students from high PSES are more likely than

those from low PSES to achieve social attainment. This is because parents in high SES can afford to have one parent stay at home and supervise their children more so than those in low SES.

Overall, the results of the study revealed strong support for the hypotheses. However, the support for hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 is mixed: social capital, cultural capital, and academic ability. This may be due to certain factors: (1) the students were still in school, (2) they may have just graduated and have not entered the labor market when they were interviewed.

A second set of regressions to examine the equivalent and non-equivalent effects of social attainment across SES groups revealed family type has a non-equivalent effect on social attainment. It shows that two-parent families benefit students in the highest quartile more than those in the lowest quartile. This means that the rich get further ahead than other groups. This is because high SES parents can afford to stay home with their children. In addition they will be able to pay for an at home care giver to take care of their kids.

Gender has an equivalent effect across SES groups on income and education but non-equivalent effects for occupational rank. Being male has an equivalent effect on education and income attainment, but a non-equivalent effect on occupational rank. Regardless of PSES males attain higher incomes than females in the same SES. This means that the gap in income attainment is not closing. Regarding education, females attain more education than males in the same parental SES quartile. Lower SES females attain higher occupation ranks than males in the same PSES. This may be because males entered into the labor market in blue collar occupations such as laborers and mechanics that have low occupation rank, while females entered in occupations that have high occupational rank such as teachers. Males in high SES attain higher

occupation ranks than females in high SES. This may be because males entered the labor market in occupations that have high ranks such as engineers and medical licensed professionals.

Asians have a non-equivalent effect on social attainment. Asians attain higher education, income, and occupational rank than whites in the same PSES. Being Hispanic, black, and Native American has an equivalent effect on social attainment irrespective of class compared to being white. Regardless of PSES, Native Americans, Hispanics, and blacks have lower social attainment than whites in the same SES. This means Asians and whites are getting further ahead in the race to social attainment than other racial groups. This is because Hispanics, African Americans, and Native Americans face discrimination in the labor market.

Academic social capital has an equivalent effect on occupational rank. Irrespective of social class, academic social capital affects all students similarly. However, students in the highest PSES are better off than those in the lowest PSES because they are near or close to the top of social attainment ladder. This means the gap in inequality is staying the same. Academic social capital has a non-equivalent effect on education. Students in the higher PSES are able to make use of the school friends to help them stay in school and achieve high education more so than those in the lowest PSES. This means the gap in inequality is widening because the rich are getting further ahead.

Community social capital has an equivalent effect on education and occupational rank, but a non-equivalent effect on income. Regardless of class, community social capital affects all students similarly in attaining high education and occupational rank. This means the distance between rich and poor students stays the same. Community social capital has a non-equivalent effect on income. Students in higher PSES made use of their participation in community agencies such as churches to help them find good paying jobs and widen the gap in inequality

Cultural capital has a non-equivalent effect on income and occupational rank, but an equivalent effect on education. Students in the lowest PSES with strong family rules on maintaining good grades, attending school regularly, and doing homework are able to achieve high income and occupational rank and close the inequality gap. Irrespective of class, cultural capital affects all students the same in attaining high education. This means inequality gap stays the same.

Finally, academic ability has an equivalent effect on occupation and education, but a non-equivalent effect on income. Academic ability affects all students similarly in attaining high occupational rank and education. This means the gap in social attainment between poor and rich students stays the same. Students in the lower PSES who scored high in Math, Reading, and History/CIT/Geography standardized test are able to attain high incomes and close the gap in inequality.

This study provides interesting insights into how PSES interacts with other factors to affect social attainment. The study shows that individuals in the lower social class can close the gap in social attainment by scoring higher in standardized tests such as Math, Reading. In addition, the study shows that regardless of class males have similar effects in achieving high income and education compared to females. This means the gap in income attainment between men and women is not closing.

A limitation of this study is that most of the students in the study were in different stages of their post-secondary education which affected levels of social attainment. In addition the data did not interview respondents five or ten years after their post-secondary education to have a good measure of their social attainment statuses. Further studies looking at social attainment

should study respondents within these time frames. Additionally, studies looking at why higher occupational ranks are not directly related to higher incomes will be helpful.

This research started out pointing out differences in inequality amongst groups in achieving social attainment. It pointed out that the gap between rich and poor has grown over the last 30 years. The results of the study showed that the rich are getting further ahead in the race for social attainment.

APPENDIX

Table 1. OCCUPATIONAL RANKS OF JOB/CATEGORIES OF STUDENTS

| Occupational Ranks | 1990 Census |
|--------------------|---|
| | Occupational Categories/Job Titles |
| 28.63 | Cooks, Chefs, Bakers, Cake Decorators |
| 29.22 | Laborers (other than farm) |
| 30.06 | Mechanic, Repairer, Service Technicians |
| 32.38 | Customer Service |
| 32.61 | Clerks, Data Entry |
| 33.77 | Farmers, Foresters, Farm Laborers |
| 34.10 | Cashiers, Tellers, Sales Clerks |
| 34.33 | Transport Operatives (not pilots) |
| 34.44 | Personal Services |
| 35.70 | Skilled Operatives |
| 36.51 | Medical Services |
| 37.45 | Secretaries and Receptionist |
| 38.22 | Craftsmen |
| 39.35 | Clerical Other |
| 39.39 | Protective Services, Criminal Justice |
| 39.39 | Military |
| 46.68 | Computer/Computer Equipment Operators |
| 51.76 | Health/Recreation Services |

Table 1. Continued

| Occupational Rank | 1990 Census |
|-------------------|---|
| | Occupational Categories/ Job Titles |
| 51.86 | Managers-Supervisory, Office, Other Admin |
| 52.45 | Performers/Artists |
| 52.45 | Human Services Professionals |
| 56.56 | Educators K-12 |
| 57.12 | Legal Support |
| 59.28 | Managers-Executive |
| 61.91 | Business/Financial Support Services |
| 62.10 | Sales/Purchasing |
| 64.75 | Research Assistants/lab Technicians |
| 68.06 | Managers-Midlevel |
| 73.23 | Medical Licensed Professionals |
| 73.61 | Financial Services Professional |
| 75.17 | Editors, Writers, Reporters |
| 75.32 | Scientist, Statistician Professionals |
| 76.31 | Computer Programmer |
| 78.68 | Technical/Professional Workers, Other |
| 83.65 | Computer Systems/Related Professionals |
| 83.89 | Engineers, Architects, Software Engineers |
| 86.98 | Educators-Instructors, Other than K-12 |
| 97.16 | Medical Practice Professionals |

TABEL 2. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

| Variables | Mean or Frequency | Standard Deviation | Factor Loading |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| 1. Log Occupational Rank | 3.84 | .326 | |
| 2. Log Income | 9.45 | 2.17 | |
| 3. Total Education | 2.87 | 1.43 | |
| Gender | | | |
| 1a. Men | 3045 | | |
| 1b. Women | 3625 | | |
| Family Type | | | |
| 1. Two-Parent | 5250 | | |
| 2. Other | 1030 | | |
| Race | | | |
| 1. Asian | 484 | | |
| 2. Hispanic | 756 | | |
| 3. Black | 562 | | |
| 4. White | 4762 | | |
| 5. Native American | 61 | | |
| Academic Ability ($\alpha = .97$) | .00 | 1.00 | |
| 1. History/CIT/Geography Standardized Score | 49.4 | 26.8 | .974 |
| 2. Reading Standardized Score | 62.4 | 20.9 | .982 |
| 3. Mathematics Standardized Score | 62.7 | 20.8 | .980 |

Table 2. Continued

| Variables | Mean Or Frequency | Standard Deviation | Factor Loading |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Social Capital | | | |
| Academic Social Capital ($\alpha = .83$) | .00 | 1.00 | |
| 1a. Among friends, how Important to attend classes regularly. | 2.48 | .603 | .775 |
| 1b. Among friends, how Important to continue education past HS | 2.58 | .613 | .755 |
| 1c. Among friends, how important to study | 2.28 | .628 | .765 |
| 1d. Among friends, how important to get good grades | 2.43 | .621 | .775 |
| 1e. Among friends, how important to finish HS | 2.84 | .431 | .720 |
| Community Social Capital ($\alpha = .61$) | | | |
| 2a. Important to do community work/volunteer | 1.40 | .561 | .806 |
| 2b. Important to participate in religious activities | 1.57 | .663 | .776 |
| Cultural Capital Family ($\alpha = .75$) | | | |
| 1. Family rule about maintaining grade | 1.30 | .458 | .800 |
| 2. Family rule about doing homework | 1.21 | .407 | .869 |
| 3. Family rule about attending school regularly | 1.10 | .293 | .809 |

Table 2. Continued

| Variables | Frequency or Mean | Standard Deviation | Factor Loading |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Quartile coding of base year PSES quartile | 3.02 | 1.71 | |
| Quartile 1 Low | 1156 | | |
| Quartile 2 | 1464 | | |
| Quartile 3 | 1727 | | |
| Quartile 4 | 2003 | | |

Table 3. Regression Results of Dependent Variables on Independent Variables.

| Variables | Income | | Total Education | | Occupational Rank | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 | Model 6 |
| Parental Socio Economic Status | .137*** (.024) | .120*** (.027) | .297*** (.011) | .280*** (.013) | .076*** (.004) | .065*** (.005) |
| Family Type | .221** (.071) | .102 (.080) | .138*** (.033) | .102** (.040) | .031** (.011) | .014 (.014) |
| Male | .773*** (.051) | .759*** (.056) | -.117*** (.024) | -.068** (.028) | -.023** (.008) | -.004 (.0010) |
| Asian | .178 (.101) | .082 (.108) | .285*** (.047) | .190*** (.054) | .107*** (.016) | .078*** (.018) |
| Hispanic | -.147 (.085) | -.028 (.100) | -.172*** (.040) | -.216*** (.050) | -.027* (.014) | -.075 (.017) |
| Black | -.071 (.099) | -.127 (.110) | -.039 (.046) | -.064 (.055) | -.012 (.016) | -.036* (.018) |
| Native American | -.424 (.284) | -.587 (.310) | -.340** (.132) | -.390** (.159) | -.001 (.046) | -.011 (.056) |
| Academic Social Capital | | .052 (.029) | | .118*** (.014) | | .031*** (.005) |
| Community Social Capital | | -.027 (.029) | | .061*** (.015) | | -.019*** (.005) |
| Cultural Capital | | -.038** (.027) | | .055*** (.014) | | .003 (.005) |
| Academic Ability (with sample size) | | -.004 | | .075*** | | .034*** |

| | | (.031) | | (.016) | | (.005) |
|-------------------------|------|--------|-------|--------|------|--------|
| N | 5853 | 4533 | 6279 | 4835 | 6139 | 4731 |
| Intercept | .094 | .106 | .044 | .053 | .015 | .018 |
| Adjusted R ² | .050 | .047 | .131 | .142 | .077 | .081 |
| F-Value | 44.9 | 21.4 | 136.7 | 73.8 | 74.5 | 38.7 |

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table 4. Regression of Income for Students on Independent Variables

| Variables | Quartile 1 | Quartile 2 | Quartile 3 | Quartile 4 |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | (Model 1) | (Model 2) | (Model 3) | (Model 4) |
| Family Type | -.098 (.171) | -.094 (.196) | .372** (.144) | -.043 (.144) |
| Male | .926*** (.148) | 1.08*** (.141) | .736*** (.102) | .505*** (.085) |
| Asian | .146 (.290) | -.257 (.311) | .208 (.209) | .084 (.146) |
| Hispanic | .072 (.179) | .050 (.232) | -.514** (.205) | .114 (.212) |
| Black | -.282 (.229) | -.269 (.259) | .202 (.201) | .088 (.212) |
| Native American | -1.90** (.765) | .471 (.675) | -1.10* (.476) | .103 (.739) |
| Academic Social Capital | .092 (.073) | .004 (.071) | .131** (.052) | -.020 (.045) |
| Community Social Capital | -.049 (.074) | -.161* (.081) | .016 (.053) | .017 (.044) |
| Cultural Capital | -.123 (.074) | -.002 (.070) | -.115* (.053) | .027 (.039) |
| Academic Ability | .042 (.073) | .028 (.077) | -.077 (.058) | .004 (.050) |

Table 4. Continued

| N | 698 | 975 | 1269 | 1588 |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Intercept | .177 | .200 | .145 | .147 |
| Adjusted R ² | .059 | .054 | .055 | .019 |
| F-Value | 5.34 | 6.58 | 8.32 | 4.03 |

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table 5. Regression of Education for Students on Independent Variables

| Variables | Quartile 1 | Quartile 2 | Quartile 3 | Quartile 4 |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| | (Model 1) | (Model 2) | (Model 3) | (Model 4) |
| Family Type | .055 (.075) | .015 (.086) | .089 (.077) | .253** (.081) |
| Male | -.040 (.066) | -.137* (.061) | -.077 (.054) | -.033 (.048) |
| Asian | .288* (.130) | .179 (.132) | .271** (.112) | .086 (.081) |
| Hispanic | -.100 (.079) | -.258** (.101) | -.381*** (.109) | -.246* (.121) |
| Black | .054 (.100) | -.236* (.110) | -.026 (.104) | -.064 (.119) |
| Native American | -.316 (.326) | -.045 (.303) | -.490 (.261) | -.923* (.432) |
| Academic Social Capital | .032 (.032) | .102*** (.031) | .142*** (.028) | .149*** (.026) |
| Community Social Capital | -.077* (.033) | -.070* (.035) | -.041 (.028) | -.066** (.025) |
| Cultural Capital | -.031 (.033) | .107*** (.030) | .031 (.028) | .056** (.022) |
| Academic Ability | .069* (.032) | .063* (.033) | .066* (.030) | .079** (.028) |

Table 5. continued

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| N | 753 | 1049 | 1343 | 1687 |
| Intercept | .077 | .087 | .078 | .083 |
| Adjusted R ² | .018 | .044 | .041 | .045 |
| F-Value | 2.41 | 5.87 | 6.81 | 8.89 |

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table 6. Regression of Occupational Rank for Students on Independent Variables

| Variables | Quartile 1 | Quartile 2 | Quartile 3 | Quartile 4 |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | (Model 1) | (Model 2) | (Model 3) | (Model 4) |
| Family Type | .010 (.029) | -.008 (.031) | .016 (.026) | .043* (.025) |
| Male | -.046* (.026) | -.047* (.022) | .007 (.018) | .029* (.015) |
| Asian | .155** (.052) | .077 (.048) | .055 (.038) | .063** (.025) |
| Hispanic | .008 (.030) | -.039 (.036) | -.076* (.037) | -.030 (.037) |
| Black | -.021 (.039) | -.059 (.039) | -.034 (.036) | -.038 (.037) |
| Native American | -.044 (1.35) | .027 (.107) | -.016 (.095) | -.018 (.133) |
| Academic Social Capital | .035** (.013) | .031** (.011) | .033*** (.009) | .026*** (.008) |
| Community Social Capital | -.025* (.013) | -.011 (.012) | -.017 (.009) | -.021 (.008) |
| Cultural Capital | -.008 (.013) | .005 (.011) | .008 (.010) | .000 (.007) |
| Academic Ability | .024* (.013) | .043*** (.012) | .023* (.010) | .041*** (.009) |

Table 6. Continued

| N | 735 | 1028 | 1315 | 1650 |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Intercept | .030 | .031 | .027 | .026 |
| Adjusted R ² | .032 | .027 | .015 | .026 |
| F-Value | 3.39 | 3.80 | 3.05 | 5.38 |

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

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